Chapter 13

Professional Development in Blended Practice: Some Insights

Geraldine Torrisi-Steele
Griffith University, Australia

ABSTRACT

It is approaching two decades since digital technologies began infiltrating higher education in earnest, and the issue of whether or not technology should be used in higher education teaching is no longer a hot topic. The use of online technologies is considered an imperative by institutions, mostly for reasons of efficiency and social expectation. From the pedagogical perspective, the use of digital technologies infuses discussion about quality in learning and teaching but the net changes in practice are minimal. In the present chapter, a case is made for continued investment of effort into designing professional development that is effective in helping academics make use of digital technologies in ways beyond simple access to content. Findings from research into the factors likely to influence how academics use technology provide some evidence of the need to contextualize professional development around educator practices.

INTRODUCTION

The use of digital technologies in higher education teaching is the norm. The type of technologies, the extent of use, and more importantly, how technology is used varies greatly among academics. It is approaching two decades since digital technologies began infiltrating higher education in earnest, but unfortunately much of the anticipated pedagogical impact has failed to occur. The early arguments about of whether or not technology should be used in higher education teaching are no longer a hot topic, and adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) is widespread. Higher education has adopted the use of ICT mostly for reasons efficiency and social expectations, and to some extent for pedagogical reasons.

Despite the time lapse and many changes since digital technology came into the higher education scene, one consistent theme is that despite early promises of technology as a catalyst to transform
teaching practice in higher education, change is minimal and, with the exception of a few outstanding cases, the transformation of academic teaching practices through use of technology has mostly failed to occur. Technology, largely online platforms, continue to be used predominantly as an 'add on' to teaching contexts for reasons of access and efficiency. Academics are not commonly integrating online platforms or other digital technologies for the purposes of meeting learning objectives through the use of innovative strategies made possible through the use digital technologies. Efforts at professional development in using technology more effectively as an integral part of the curriculum have all in all, not made great difference. The majority of academics continue to use technology as an add on, using communication technologies for communication purposes, some use of collaborative learning tools, and the use of technology for delivery of content. Thus the observations made a decade ago about academics' use of technology with face-to-face teaching remains - only a minority of academics are successfully combining technology with their face-to-face teaching to provide effective, high quality learning experiences through the use of blended approaches (Collis & Van Der Wende, 2002; Graham & Robison, 2007; Driscoll, 2002; Hoffman, 2006; Jeffrey, Milne & Suddaby, 2014) The term ‘blended’ is being used here, to simply mean the combined use of face to face teaching with ICT components. Shortly we will return to the definition of blended learning and explore it further. From the perspective of those such as learning designers and blended learning advisors, the question of how to best support academic staff in the use of ICT technologies for enriching the learning environment remains unresolved. Though not empirical evidence, recent conversations between the author and learning design/blended learning advisors in various universities confirm this state of affairs, indeed with some advisors feeling that in reality very little has changed in terms of success of academic professional development in the domain of ICT in higher education teaching. Professional development for educators is challenging, with the most frequent complaints being related to programs being perceived as fragmented, superficial or improperly addressing their needs (Singh, 2014)

The reasons why the uptake of ICT in higher education has been slow to move beyond supplementary use, are likely many and the complexity of using technologies effectively along side face-face teaching must be acknowledged as a likely major source of challenge. Blending face-to-face teaching practices with technology based strategies is a complex undertaking. Beyond supplemental use, effectively combining both face-to-face and technology requires a complex body of knowledge, and substantial investment in course re-design (as opposed to course translation into digital mode). Using technology in teaching requires significant course redesign, usually involving the creation of new learning activities and reconsideration of assessment methods (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Redesigning courses to exploit technology based strategies requires solid pedagogical knowledge in the discipline and a base of understanding of both types of technological tools available and their attributes. In such a complex undertaking, the need to provide appropriate professional support and development is evident; how to best provide the appropriate professional support is not so evident.

The basic premise underlying the present chapter is that to develop more effective professional support to academics in relation to using technology as an effective learning tool, it is important to understand first the various factors that will likely facilitate effective use or perhaps hinder its use. At the core of the chapter is a report on a study designed to shed some light on such factors. However, before reporting the study, the reasons why there should be concern about how technology is used in higher education are discussed, the definition of blended learning is explored as more than simply face to face together with technology.
Related Content

**A Code of Our Own: Making Meaning Queerly**
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/a-code-of-our-own/170995?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/a-code-of-our-own/170995?camid=4v1a)

**An Overview of Disaster and Emergency Management Systems Models**
[www.igi-global.com/article/an-overview-of-disaster-and-emergency-management-systems-models/196602?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/an-overview-of-disaster-and-emergency-management-systems-models/196602?camid=4v1a)

**Formation of Students’ Research Competence in the Framework of Innovative Educational Clusters**
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/formation-of-students-research-competence-in-the-framework-of-innovative-educational-clusters/196481?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/formation-of-students-research-competence-in-the-framework-of-innovative-educational-clusters/196481?camid=4v1a)

**Applications of Nano Technology in Civil Engineering: A Review**
[www.igi-global.com/article/applications-of-nano-technology-in-civil-engineering/196604?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/applications-of-nano-technology-in-civil-engineering/196604?camid=4v1a)